

NCOs can assist in making non-support cases nonexistent

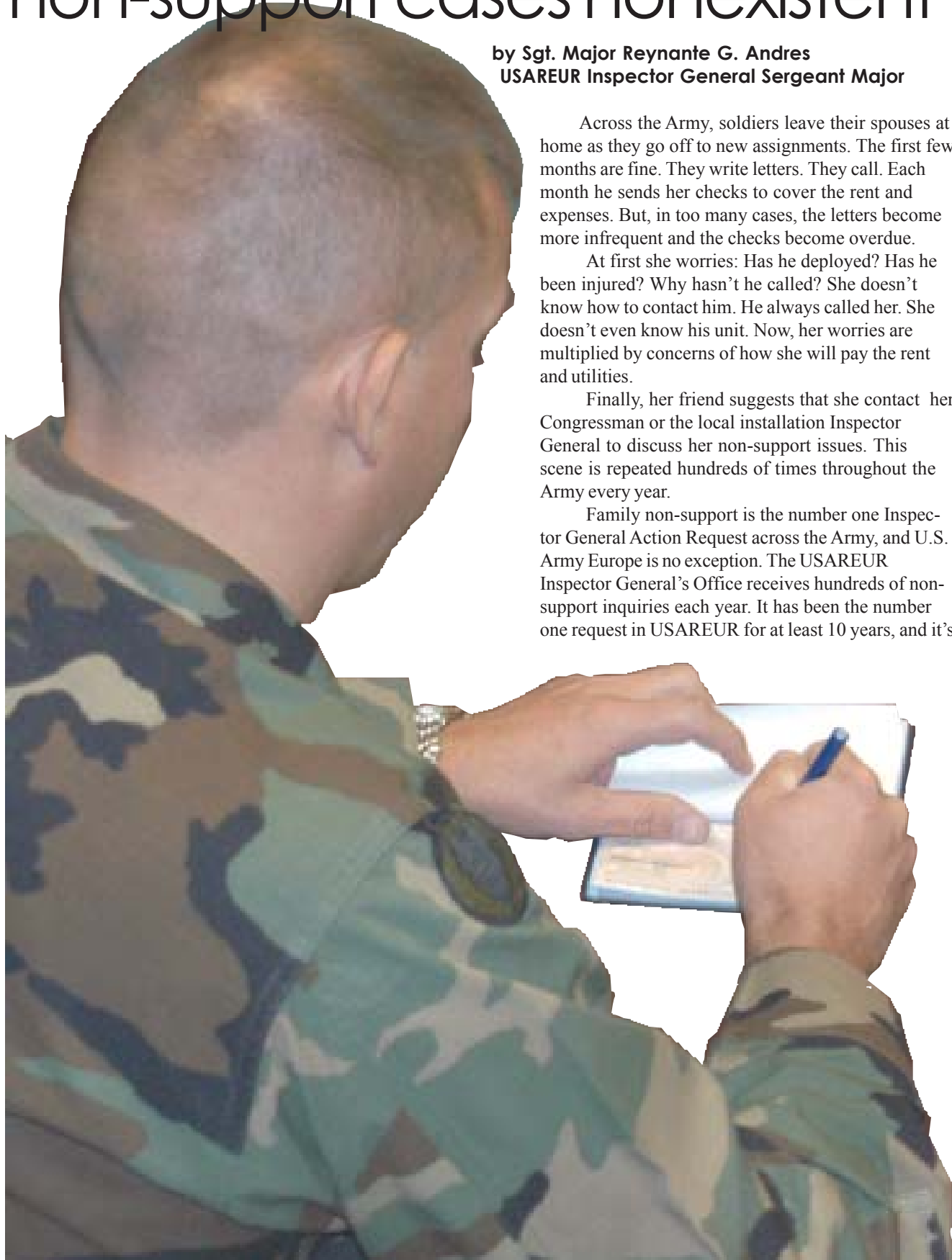
by Sgt. Major Reynante G. Andres
USAREUR Inspector General Sergeant Major

Across the Army, soldiers leave their spouses at home as they go off to new assignments. The first few months are fine. They write letters. They call. Each month he sends her checks to cover the rent and expenses. But, in too many cases, the letters become more infrequent and the checks become overdue.

At first she worries: Has he deployed? Has he been injured? Why hasn't he called? She doesn't know how to contact him. He always called her. She doesn't even know his unit. Now, her worries are multiplied by concerns of how she will pay the rent and utilities.

Finally, her friend suggests that she contact her Congressman or the local installation Inspector General to discuss her non-support issues. This scene is repeated hundreds of times throughout the Army every year.

Family non-support is the number one Inspector General Action Request across the Army, and U.S. Army Europe is no exception. The USAREUR Inspector General's Office receives hundreds of non-support inquiries each year. It has been the number one request in USAREUR for at least 10 years, and it's



a growing concern, not only for USAREUR, but also for the Army at large.

In USAREUR, the problem is amplified by the distance factor. Some soldiers believe they can disregard their obligation to support their family members because they are 4,000 miles from home. They don't understand that Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is for family support or it returns to the U.S. Treasury.

NCOs can assist commanders in fixing this problem by enforcing Army standards, along with educating and informing our soldiers about their financial obligations.

The USAREUR IG is using a comprehensive teach-and-train program geared toward the company leadership to reduce the burden that non-support issues bring to our units.

In the USAREUR Office of the Inspector General, we have initiated the following in an attempt to set our leaders up for success:

First, we brief soldiers on their financial support responsibilities during their initial processing into the unit. During this briefing, we focus on policy, the commander's responsibility, the soldier's responsibility and what can happen if you ignore your obligation. (See inset box for more details.)

Second, we encourage commanders and first sergeants to ensure new soldiers are counseled on the repercussions of nonsupport to family members during the Reception and Integration stages of inprocessing.



Third, we conduct teach-and-train seminars at the Commanders/First Sergeants and Rear Detachment courses. In one of these seminars, we offer tactics and techniques for solving family non-support issues, and we offer suggestions on how they can prevent it.

Fourth, we're expanding our training programs to include the USAREUR NCO

Academy, especially the Primary Leadership Development Course. We believe

that teaching these young NCOs early in their career will better prepare them and their soldiers to prevent non-support problems.

The way ahead: Time will tell whether or not we are successful at drawing down the number of complaints concerning non-support. We strongly believe that incorporating the Non-support Teach and Train Scenario into our leadership courses – and particularly the NCOES school system – will build more informed and better educated soldiers. Equipping our leaders with knowledge on how to prevent issues before they become crisis will yield high returns in the future. We recommend our approach as one way of dealing with a long-standing issue that has distracted our units from important readiness and well-being priorities for years.

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The USAREUR approach

Policy – We remind soldiers that financial support of family members is an official matter of concern. It is an individual soldier responsibility and a command issue.

Commander's responsibilities – We inform soldiers that commanders have the responsibilities to enforce the policies outlined in AR 608-99. The commanders must determine whether a violation of the regulation occurred, counsel soldiers when substantiated complaints are brought against them, inform them of Department of Army policy on support of family members, and take appropriate action against soldiers who fail to comply with AR 608-99 or lawful orders.

Soldier's responsibilities – We tell soldiers that they have to maintain reasonable contact with their family members so that the family's financial needs and welfare do not become official matters for the Army. They have to conduct themselves in an honorable manner with regard to parental commitments and responsibilities. They have to provide adequate financial support to their family members. And, they have to comply with all court orders.

What can happen to you if you ignore your obligation – we emphasize that the Army is serious about non-support and they can receive a memorandum of reprimand, bar to reenlistment, administrative separation from the service, nonjudicial punishment under UCMJ, and even court martial if they do not fulfill their obligations.